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DE RUEHEG #1948 1771344
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 261344Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5834

UNCLAS CAIRO 001948

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [KISL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: MUFTI ISSUES FATWA AGAINST FEMALE GENITAL
MUTILATION

REF: CAIRO 345

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (U) On June 23, Dr. Ali Gomaa, Egypt's Mufti, issued an official fatwa on Al-Mehwar satellite TV banning female genital mutilation (FGM). His fatwa, proclaiming that it is "religiously prohibited to circumcise girls," was issued following Egyptian press coverage of the death of a 12 year old girl last week during a FGM operation at a rural clinic in Southern Egypt. The Mufti in his comments said, "I have said this once and will say it again many times-- this practice is haram, haram, haram (forbidden, forbidden, forbidden)." The Mufti's announcement last week is the first such senior-level Egyptian fatwa against this dangerous practice although the Grand Sheikh of Al Azahar, Mohamed Sayyed Tantawi, has previously called FGM "un-Islamic."

¶2. (U) The fatwa comes after a November 2006 conference at Al-Azhar University entitled "Banning the Violation of Women's Bodies" (ref). At the conference, for the first time, scholars and influential religious institutions spoke out in unison against the custom. Although recently opposition to FGM has risen, it is still estimated to be practiced by a majority of Egyptian Muslim and Christian women. In a recent survey regarding FGM, 60% of Egyptians polled believes that the procedure is required by "religious precepts." Following Gomaa's fatwa, Dr. Soad Saleh, a well known professor of jurisprudence, reiterated in the Egyptian press that FGM is not part of Islam.

¶3. (U) The Egyptian Doctor's Syndicate has reportedly launched an investigation into the death of the deceased 12-year old girl. According to press reports, the girl's father has filed a lawsuit against the doctor who performed the operation for negligence, and he could face up to 2 years in jail. First Lady Suzanne Mubarak commented to reporters on June 25 that the girl's death "is the beginning of the end of FGM" and it "is proof of the negative, inhumane practices of FGM." Ambassador Moshira Khattab, Secretary General of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, called on the People's Assembly to endorse "a severe" penalty on the doctor. Khattab noted that, by harshly punishing the doctor, he will serve as an example for other doctors and practitioners. Khattab publicly thanked the Mufti for issuing the fatwa, asserting that "lives of girls will be saved without being accused of implementing a western agenda." Other Egyptian NGO leaders believe that a law should be drafted to formally make FGM a crime.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The Mufti's fatwa is a step in the right direction towards stemming the practice of FGM in Egypt. Embassy contacts comment that the next operational step in the fight against FGM is for the Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) to instruct imams of Egyptian mosques to tackle the issue during Friday sermons-- "people need to be assured that it is now officially haram to practice FGM and that it

is not part of Islam."

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